

FOLK LIFE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE

182 anxiety, weakening the stability that obtained in the traditional social
178 structure. My informant, Mahmoud, told me once, 'If the present people
of Silwa find you writing a complaint to the Government against some-
body, they will spontaneously offer their signature or their stamp without
asking you about the nature of the complaint, or even against whom'.
He went on to say, 'These people never learn a lesson. God sent them the
malaria epidemic followed by the torrent that swept their harvest, but
they never guard against God's anger, and they will go on eating each
other's flesh.'

• 155 Such insecurity and anxiety is bound to have its repercussions upon the
children as they grow up. Hearing remarks of dissatisfaction about the
environment and the people in general from their elders, the children
themselves feel insecure and become more suspicious.

178 To sum up, the folk life of the village has certainly undergone a certain
amount of change from the point of view of what some anthropologists
call the material culture, and the instruments of living. The villagers, for
instance, are more familiar with pecuniary values and commercial trans-
actions. More often than not, borrowing money at present is accompanied
[426] by writing a receipt, while hitherto this was considered to be a social
disgrace. Even at present, some creditors hand over the receipt to a third
person to keep it as a sign of his reluctance to accept a written bond. Like
Chan Kom, however, commercialism has not entered the primary family.
The writer has not heard of sisters or brothers living together doing
business with each other on a commercial basis, and it is almost incon-
ceivable of a father hiring his son, or a son his father.¹

[369] It is obvious that the villagers are keen to accept and imitate the
material symbols of city life, and it is on the material level that the folk
culture of the village has been relatively more exposed to the processes
of social change. On the other hand, social structure and organization and
values have not changed very much. Apart from the few unsatisfied
deviants, the conceptual and social orientation of the village folk life still
holds valid as the same principles that have guided conduct, behaviour,
and relationships are still maintained. In this pattern of folk living, the
[182] focal point is undoubtedly religion, as it continues to be the validating force
of life, explaining it, and providing people with their major intellectual
and emotional satisfactions and dissatisfactions in coping with the prob-
lems of life.

¹ Robert Redfield, *A Village that Chose Progress (Chan Kom Revisited)*, p. 66.

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861 the continuity or discontinuity of disciplinary policy between infancy and childhood:

- (1) Societies where infant and later disciplines are weak.
- (2) Societies where infant and later disciplines are severe.
- (3) Societies where infant disciplines are severe and later disciplines are weak.
- (4) Societies where infant disciplines are weak, and later disciplines are severe.

Goldfrank continues to say: 'From the standpoint of logic these categories pose no problems. However, difficulties may arise when an attempt is made to assign specific societies to any one of them, for permissiveness and pressure are present at all stages of development.'¹ The writer feels that the child-rearing practices compared with infant practices could be classified, without much debate or appearance of subjectivity, into the fourth category of societies where infant disciplines are weak, permissive, and protective, while the later disciplines are prompt, strict, and on the whole, severe.

It has been shown in Chapter IV on infancy how the angelic children are treated permissively and with very few controls until they start to respond orally to the external world. Perhaps the only forbidden fruit in the mother's paradise for the child is the biting of her breast while he is suckling, which normally results in her withdrawal of the breast from him, and might be accompanied by some angry words or a push. On the other hand, we have noticed how the period of childhood is seized upon to discipline the child, and make him conform as well as know his position in the adult world.

155 In this connection, a question of a psychological nature could be asked. How does the child bridge the gap or adjust himself between the early permissive training and the stern childhood discipline without a complete disintegration of his personality? In answer to such a question, certain points must be remembered. The child receives the pressures of socialization, and forgoes his mother's blessings at a stage when he is capable of using his newly-developed interest, such as walking and talking, in his contacts with other children. The social arrangement of the extended family could be also considered as a factor in making up for the mother's deprivation. The rough and aggressive games are an outlet for the strain of socialization during childhood. The gap is also bridged through the integration of the child into the work of the adults. From the economic point of view, the child is continuously conditioned to participate in farm work as a responsible member. Through work in the fields, which is meaningful for the child and indispensable to his family, the child is incorporated in the family circle, and is recognized as a valuable member in it,

¹ Esther S. Goldfrank, 'Socialization, Personality and the Structure of the Pueblo Society', in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. XLVII, 1945, p. 517.

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and this contributes in no small way to the satisfaction of the individual's psychological need for social recognition.¹ These are some of the forces the writer regards as maintaining some sort of healthy effect in the growing up of children in Silwa; otherwise the strain of childhood would have been unbearable in a predominantly authoritarian community where the child is regarded as its father's possession. Erich Fromm would consider such a community as thwarting the child's legitimate strivings for freedom, independence, and self-fulfilment. He maintains that the social arrangement of an authoritarian patriarchal society, frustrating man's wishes to self-realization, tends to create in him a destructive passion, which in turn must be suppressed by external or internal force.²

If one thinks of the disciplinary policies of childhood in terms of a straight line, at one end of which is the easy-going discipline of some primitive societies, and at the other end the harsh discipline of a society like the Japanese, it is apparent that the type of discipline to be found in Silwa is closer to that of the Japanese society than to that of those primitive societies.

The period of childhood is considered by the adult as an unimportant stage which should be quickly passed over. The writer seldom noticed grown-ups talking about their childhood, and his informants found it very difficult, even unbecoming, to recall their childhood days. The villagers' attitude towards children is indeed a mixed one, regarding them both as supernumerary entities as well as a sub-adult. A child is an economic asset as well as a social nuisance. It was shown in Chapter I how the child is continuously expected to take over from the adult the tasks which it is capable of performing as a part of its acquisition of discipline—'adab'. On the level of social action, however, it is supposed to be insignificant and to have no opinion of its own. On the whole, a son or a daughter, whether young or old, cannot replace the parent in performing formal social obligations; for example, taking gifts to circumcision and wedding ceremonies or entertaining a guest, unless there are extenuating circumstances which justify it. The child's world is always connected with the female world rather than the grown-up male world. In the ceremonial celebrations, children are usually mixed with women more than with men. If children happened to be in a male gathering, they must keep to their place, and be able to withdraw at the earliest opportunity to play on their own, or to join the female crowd. At this level of social action, the unity of the social sphere between children and grown-ups tends to break. Although the child's life is directed towards aims, responsibilities, and values similar

¹ C. M. Fleming, *Adolescence*, pp. 47-8. See also Abram Kardiner in *The Individual and His Society*, where he emphasizes the emotional meaning of work: 'There is, first, the intrinsic gratification in work as a form of mastery. This must be credited with being a basic gratification. The satisfactions derived from it are common to all forms of mastery. They give the individual a feeling of effectiveness and control' (p. 30).

² Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*, pp. 133-8.

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539 On encountering in the folklore a constellation like the Oedipus situation, it is more profitable, instead of immediately recognizing 'a universal Oedipus complex', biologically determined, to proceed 'to examine the conditions in the actual experience of the individual, which contribute to the formation of such a constellation'.¹ Such expressions could be well explained in the light of the social institutions of the village, the dominant feature of which is that the individual in his 'growing up' finds himself constantly coming up against authority and power, and therefore his orientation for achievement of social or psychological independence is grossly hampered. Paradoxically enough, the villagers' vulnerability and hypersensitivity to the feeling of 'dependence' on social or economic levels are very intense. To remind someone of help rendered to him is a positive insult; and it is disgraceful to work as a hired labourer. 'The repudiation of dependency is surely making a virtue of necessity.' The individual's craving for power manifests itself in such social norms as refusal to accept compensation, generosity which implies giving without being asked, so that the receiver would not be dependent or obliged to give back; otherwise it is a reciprocal type of give and take, making the receiver a debtor. To this virtue of repudiating dependency may be attributed the excessive insistence while offering, with excessive reluctance in accepting anything, whether a cigarette or an invitation to food. This almost ritualistic feature governs the etiquette of behaviour in many situations where interpersonal relationships are involved.
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The third theme which occurs in some of the tales is that of revenge and retaliation to 'clear one's name' from shame ('ar) (stories IX, XIV, XVI, XVII, XVIII). In these tales, even Jiha, the insignificant man, must take revenge on his detractors. With this, there is emphasis on trickery and chicanery to achieve one's ends and to outdo one's enemies. Such themes, according to Kardiner, are indications of emotional tensions of people who 'oscillate between uninhibited self-glorification and constant anxiety of being outdone and humiliated'.² As in Japan, a slur darkens one's good name and has to be removed without a compromise, although in Silwa there are no cases of suicide ever reported as a means of ridding oneself from shame as such an act would constitute a major sin.³ One may attribute this sensitive development of the ego to situations of excessive sibling rivalry, and the unevenness of the process of 'growing up', where severe disciplines are imposed during childhood, and severe sexual restrictions and sex dichotomy during adolescence, in contrast with a permissive infancy-training system.⁴

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¹ Abram Kardiner, *The Individual and His Society*, p. 133.

² A. Kardiner, op. cit., p. 117.

³ See Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, p. 143.

⁴ See J. F. Ritchie, 'The African as a Suckling and an Adult', *Rhodes-Livingstone Papers*, No. 9, 1943, for the effects of an uneven process of 'growing up' on adult behaviour and personality development from a psycho-analytical point of view.

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contours with extra pieces of cloth, in the downcast look of boys when speaking to an adult, a well-known characteristic of this stage of development. The writer also noticed on many occasions adolescent boys who were either enraged or ashamed on seeing their mother sitting with relatives outside the house at night, others who threw dust at their adolescent sisters and even married sisters when looking outside the house without proper covering, even when no man was passing by. When sisters become 'a shame' in the matter of going out fetching water or running errands, adolescent boys do not object to taking over some of these duties.¹ The writer also noticed an adolescent boy who, rebuked by his mother on the grounds of his 'mature age' and 'the smell of his pubic hair', flared up with rage and wept. This may be an extreme case, but it is indicative of the excessive shame and apprehension connected with sex. Obviously girls have not much scope for venting the pressures of sexual repressions, and they become more sullen and apprehensive than the boys, but not for long, as they are soon to get married. This excessively repressive and restrictive discipline over sex marks out the process of growing up in this community under study from Taleland and Samoa, where the attitude towards sex is much more permissive. [831] [154]

At this juncture it is appropriate to apply Kardiner's constructs concerning the effect on the basic personality structure of the way a culture satisfies the individual's dependency cravings, which are biologically determined. It seems that this excessive prohibition on sexuality at the stage of adolescence is a social discipline imposed to create and perpetuate the attitude of timidity and dependence of the growing individuals on their seniors. To obey such a discipline is a method of ingratiation, and of establishing conditions for being loved, protected and socially accepted. Thus it works as a lever which parental authority manipulates to make children acquiescent and dependent and as a social technique for minimizing initiative and ambition.² These exaggerated cravings of dependency and their concomitant consequences of the inflation of the parental image and social conformity probably explain the psychological undercurrents lying behind the great indifference to social change in this village as well as in many other similar communities in Egypt. 155 •

To what extent do inordinate sibling rivalry and excessive shame and [152]

¹ See Appendix VIII, where one of the adolescent boys evinces his shame at his sister's growing breast.

² This is based on Kardiner's explanation that restrictive sex discipline creates instead of a friendly attitude to the impulse, one of anxiety which is in 'anticipation of danger'. 'Instead of the self-confidence and the idea "I can get pleasure by and from myself", there appears an exaggerated idea of the cruelty of the forbidding parent. Instead of the attitude of self-confidence, the opposite develops—a lack of it, together with an inordinate increase in dependency and timidity.' He further maintains that interference with sexual development creates exaggerated dependency, the inflation of the parental image, an overvaluation of the boons of dependency, and the encouragement of secondary outlets for the repressed hostility to the interfering disciplinarian. *The Individual and His Society*, p. 28.

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● 155 guilt, especially with regard to sex, produce the psychological disposition
152 to sexual jealousy institutionalized in this community as well as in many
[694] other communities in rural Egypt? It is well known that in Egypt disputes
over land, water and women rank as three of the most common causes
of crime.¹ This does not mean that sibling rivalry and sex prohibitions
are the only causes, but seem to provide the psychological field for the
moral and religious values connected with fidelity and the propriety of
sexual jealousy. A woman is identified not only with 'shame' but also
with 'honour' and to preserve one's honour is tantamount to avoid ex-
posure to shame.²

[80] These attitudes, according to Kardiner, would also help to understand
the dichotomy of sexes and to prevent sexual jealousies from coming out
to open hostilities. They also appear to be one of the weapons of social
equilibrium and of preserving in-male and in-female solidarity.³

599 Here it is also possible to give some satisfactory answer to the connec-
tion between the nature of the community and its demands on individuals
as represented by sexual regulations. The central and principal quality
in a polite (muaddab) or virtuous person is his conformity to the norms
governing sexual behaviour; the flouting of which in any manner would
condemn him as impolite and vicious irrespective of his other qualities.
Morality and virtue are primarily connected with stringent sexual con-
trols. The villagers, although envying the city dwellers their material
comfort, deplore their moral laxity, e.g. women's emancipation in dress,
love affairs, use of cosmetics, women's participation in men's work. In this
community I heard of no cases of adultery or illegitimate children for the
[837] last thirty years, though cases of homosexuality and jokes about sexual
[848] pleasure from animals are not uncommon amongst the adolescents and
[838] young men. Stringent sexual controls are an essential agent for the main-
[839] tenance of solidarity, the cohesion and the orderly living of a group with
its puritanic religious code and its social organization based, among other
things, on a clear-cut sex dichotomy.⁴

882 Whatever views may be held about the psychological problems con-
885 nected with adolescence in Silwa, this stage is certainly the prologue to
the full status of adulthood which is eventually attained by marriage.
Marriage, after circumcision, marks the greatest ceremonial occasion in
the individual's life. The best way of describing marriage conditions in
585 Silwa is to give an account of a marriage ceremony which the writer

¹ Doreen Warriner, *Land and Poverty in the Middle East*, London, 1948.

² Cf. J. C. Flugel, *Men and their Motives*, London, 1943, and Ernest Jones, *Papers on Psycho-analysis*, where he writes: 'The ultimate source of the fear and guilt that lie behind all these reactions (of sexual jealousy) is the relationship to another potential man and it is derived from the boy's unconscious fixation on childish attitudes; it is hard for him to "picture" a woman quite apart from another man to whom she secretly belongs.' p. 483.

³ A. Kardiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 476-7.

⁴ See Margaret Read, 'The Moral Code of the Ngoni and their former Military State', in *Africa*, Vol. XI, 1938.

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Questions of motivation, drive, adjustment, frustration, methods of learning, reaction to authority, modes of fantasy gratification, and the end-product of all these forces in the ego-structure are important elements in the study of personality. In this study it was discussed how the social disciplines contribute to produce submissive, obedient children who lack the spirit of enterprise and initiative. Adults continuously wean their offspring from flights of imagination and spontaneity of action till they almost completely achieve their end by the time their offspring reach adolescence. Mead emphasizes the importance of the cultural methods of socialization as: 'The child will have as an adult the imprint of his culture upon him whether his society hands him the tradition with a shrug, throws it at him like a bone to a dog, teaches him each item with care and anxiety or leads him towards manhood as if he were on a sight-seeing tour. But which method his society uses will have far-reaching results in the attitudes of the growing child, upon the way he phrases the process of growing up, upon the resentment or enthusiasm with which he meets the inevitable social pressure from the adult world.'¹

One of the important psychological mechanisms in the personality of individuals in the community culture of Silwa is the conception of the power of fate, a mechanism which is found in many other peasant communities. According to Kardiner such a mechanism is a tendency to shift personal responsibility on to others or on to supernatural forces. The prevalence of such a tendency is a cultural mode of displacing dependency on parent-surrogates, and thus escaping blame and punishment. With belief in fate one can correlate the presence of very little anxiety about sickness, misfortunes such as divorce, and indifference to self-improvement. It could be said that conditions of closed economy, together with the stifling weight of social and parental pressures, may be considered as important factors in this projective mechanism of fate. In a masterly passage about the Tanala culture of Madagascar, Kardiner maintains that: 'The belief in fate—singularly effective in shunting direct envy and overt-hostility—is a monument to the underlying absolutism which characterizes the culture. It shifts the responsibility from those who actually have power or advantages and places it upon a kind of mechanistic conception of human destiny. The chief function of the belief is to compel the individual to accept his role in life, and not bother those who exploit him, though he is given some right to attempt to alter his fate by magic means. If this fails, he has only fate to blame.'² Such is an illustration of the contribution that psychology could make to deepen our understanding of social facts.

In this work certain methods and techniques of childhood and adolescent training systems were correlated with some aspects of the cultural behaviour of adults and some of the major trends in their personality structure. In discerning such correlations, functional ties between certain

¹ Margaret Mead, *Growing up in New Guinea*, p. 168.

² A. Kardiner, *The Individual and his Society*, p. 314.

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- 155 observed facts were noted by the writer, but no special effort was made to establish their causal relationships or irreversible sequences.¹

In the light of this study, the psycho-analytical assumption of the relationship between some biological experiences in early childhood and certain adult character traits cannot be confirmed. It is difficult to reconcile, as in the case of the Navaho material, the adults' prevailing attitudes of suspicion, secretiveness, and high level of tension, with the permissive training of infants in breast-feeding, bodily affection and evacuation activities. If one takes the criteria of some psycho-analysts as the sole guide for personality formation, one would expect adults in this community to be cheerful folk, without much constraint in their personal relations, and free and easy in the communication of their innermost feelings and thoughts. One can infer from the data of this study that the experiences and disciplines of later childhood and adolescence are equally, if not more, important in the formation of personality structure of the adults. It is apparent from some sociological studies that to consider a particular experience as traumatic or not, or as favourable or unfavourable for individual adjustment, it must be regarded in relation to other aspects of child life, e.g. nutrition, health and sickness, economic conditions of life, and social disciplines.

From the Navaho studies, Kluckhohn concludes that psycho-analytical theorists are not wholly wrong, but they claim too much for the earliest years of life and do not pay enough attention to later events and to the total situation in which the individual matures.

'Infantile indulgence very probably does constitute the firmest foundation upon which, if late circumstances are reasonably favourable, a secure and confident adult personality can be developed. But it affords only a possible basis; it does not, of itself, promise fulfilment.'²

Such a conclusion was also supported by an experiment on rats in an attempt to evaluate the relationship between breast-feeding and acquisitiveness. Hunt experimented on albino rats to determine the effect of feeding-frustration in infancy and the tendency to hoard in adulthood. By comparing the number of pellets stored by two experimental sets of rats, one of which was subjected to periods of hunger, while the other was allowed unlimited feeding during infancy, he reached the following two main conclusions:

(1) The infantile feeding-frustration had no effect on the number of pellets hoarded, while both sets of adult animals were continuously satiated.

(2) The effect of infantile frustration on adult behaviour was shown by the fact that the experimental animals which had been frustrated in their

¹ See Simon Marcson, 'Some Methodological Consequences of Correlational Analysis in Anthropology', in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. XLV, 1943.

² C. Kluckhohn, 'Navaho Infancy and Childhood', in *Psycho-analysis and the Social Sciences*, Vol. I, ed. by Géza Róheim, New York, 1947, p. 86.

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unlimited feeding during infancy hoarded more than two and a half times as many pellets as the other set in the post-frustration tests.¹ 155

It is possible to infer from the experiment on the rats that the early infantile experiences did not produce the expected trait unconditionally, but their fulfilment was contingent on later environmental conditions. It was hunger in these tests that made one set resort to its early experience.

With the complexity of human needs and modes, the picture of the foundations of human personality becomes more complicated. But whether one follows the psycho-analytical interpretations or follows the framework of a learning theory based on the conditioning of attitudes and interests of children, one cannot ignore the important trends that are stamped on the individual's personality during his early stages of the process of growing up.

In this book, as stated in the introduction, the main concern has been with the general trends and attributes of personality in terms of predictable behaviour. Detailed case studies of individuals with differently constituted personality types would enrich and clarify such diffused and cross-cultural approach. This would reveal how different types of personalities face, handle, and react to the cultural realities, thus either achieving personal adjustment or becoming maladjusted.² No one should claim after reading this work that he knows exactly what to expect from every individual in this community, or knows exactly how every one of its members behaves in every situation. The variety and variability of behaviour and action, with which we were not mainly concerned, must not be neglected. Moreover the subjective element and the 'personal equation' of any writer cannot be completely eliminated in the art of writing in social science. 121

This work represents, moreover, an attempt to study educational issues in the broadest sense of the term, as a function of the cultural tradition that is transmitted to each generation. The 'transmissive' and 'reproductive' role of education in managing and perpetuating cultural organization, maintaining law and order, ways of sanctioning custom and action, have been discussed in this small community. The writer submits that such a type of research is imperative in a society where there are two educational traditions in juxtaposition: the indigenous and the modern. An objective evaluation of the interrelationship between these two traditions must be based on studies of the local culture, as well as an analysis of the aims and achievements of the modern system of schools.³

¹ J. McV. Hunt, 'The Effects of Infant Feeding-Frustration upon Adult Hoarding in the Albino Rat', in *Contemporary Psycho-pathology*, ed. by Silvan S. Tomkins, Harvard University Press, 1947, pp. 425-44.

² Karen Horney maintains that the child in coping with the world in its process of growing up develops one of three basic strategies of life: it can move towards people, against them, or from them. *Our Inner Conflicts*, New York, 1945.

³ A strong plea for studies on childhood and educational institutions on those lines has been advanced by Professor Margaret Read in her inaugural lecture on 'Education and Cultural Tradition'. See also her review of 'Umbundu Kinship and Character' by Gladwyn Murray Childs, in *Africa*, Vol. XXI, 1951.

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as other anthropologists, have viewed the efficacy of modern education in schools, and the problems that face the adolescent in the modern complex society. They have pointed out the gaps in modern education in the transmission of the cultural heritage, especially at the stage of adolescence, when transition from childhood dependence to adult independence is expected to take place.¹ 000

As far as Silwa is concerned, it has been shown how the child-training practices impress on the growing individual the social norms with certain dominant themes at different stages. It has also been noted that the child-training system reflects many of the social and psychological attitudes of adult behaviour. Attempts have been made throughout this work to discern some correlations between adult values and personality structure, and techniques of instilling children with 'adab'. Children begin to adopt some of the cultural values of the community even during childhood, e.g. assertive, aggressive, and rivalry attitudes towards other children, while there is submissive and obedient behaviour towards elders; observance of sex regulations and behaviour before puberty; the earlier attainment by girls of sociological maturity, and so on. It was also pointed out from observations, tests, dreams and Rorschach responses, that the children's flights of imagination are curbed at an early stage, thus making the children show striking interest in adult activities of farming, ceremonial celebrations, and kinship relations. The policy of child-training in Silwa sets the pattern of the social relations of individuals in their groupings, and incorporates them as well in the productive activities of the community. 155 •

Against such a background of the cultural tradition, one can draw certain conclusions. One can see the contributions that an educational institution may make in the social and economic life of a community. One can ascertain the difficulties encountered in its proper functioning. Furthermore, one can view in proper perspective the complex process which children undergo in adjusting themselves to school curriculum and its values on one hand and to the prevailing conditions of home training on the other. 000

Many educational thinkers have emphasized the importance of relating the school to the needs of the community. In this connection it is often assumed that elements in the educational content of a community could be transferred easily with benefit to the school curricula, providing stimulation, and provoking the interest of the learners. Such assumptions often ignore the new situation which has arisen out of the cultural contacts. Those who are thinking in such ways wishfully hope to recreate the past; but in their zeal they tend to ignore the basis of the community's educative forces.² In this community, for example, the inclusion in a reading book of some of the local fairy tales, or the inclusion of some of the children's games in the school, would be considered facetious and undignified by 198 [89]

¹ Margaret Mead, *Growing Up in New Guinea*.

² See M. Read, review of Gladwyn M. Childs' book referred to earlier.